



Connecticut Association for Human Services
237 Hamilton Street, Suite 208
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cahs.org

Casey McGuane, President
James Horan, Chief Executive Officer
860.951.2212
860.951.6511 fax

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Testimony in Opposition to H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Good Evening Senator Formica, Senator Osten, and Representative Walker

My name is Elizabeth Fraser, I am the Policy Manager for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success for children and families through both policy and program work.

I am speaking today to in opposition to the Governor's midterm budget adjustment proposal; CAHS is opposed to the recommended consolidation of agency funding in the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities budget, both the consolidation of the state universities, community colleges, and Charter Oak State College, and the consolidation of the developmental education line item into the broader CSCU funding. This is especially important as the Governor proposes to cut funding for CSCU overall. With this cut and consolidation, it is likely that the developmental education funding will simply cover other costs, and not address the important needs of students needing developmental education to succeed.

We are in a challenging economic environment and we know difficult decisions will need to be made to produce a balanced budget. However, the Governor's proposed budget shifts the responsibility and options for making crucial spending decisions from a transparent, public process of the General Assembly, toward one that is opaque, and potentially leaves the bulk of the decision making with the Executive Branch.

First, the consolidation of Charter Oak State College, the community college system and Connecticut State University could ultimately undermine our system of higher education. Each of these institutes serves a different purpose, for different demographic populations. Each is a necessary rung on a ladder of opportunity. Each needs to be appropriately funded with the ability of communities, the public and the elected officials to weigh in on any possible cuts to services.

We are concerned that consolidating line items will make it difficult to ensure that funding is used for its original allocation. For example, a 5% cut in a consolidated budget would potentially allow agencies to make cuts from one or two institutions within the bundle, rather than equally across each line item. Hypothetically, this could leave those programs with smaller allocations at risk for very large cuts or at risk for elimination. Additionally, if a budget mitigation plan becomes necessary, the potential would exist for the executive branch to just eliminate "low hanging fruit",

including programs that might not be as widely understood as others, but are important to a system of serving the citizens of Connecticut.

As proponents of policies that serve to lift low income families, we are especially concerned that this proposal might impact the designated “developmental services” funding. This funding provides for a series of remedial opportunities for students who have a high school diploma or equivalency certificate, but may need additional supports to be successful in a college environment.

These include three levels of developmental education offered within the community college system. The highest level is the Embedded Level, which is college level instruction with embedded developmental support for students with 12th grade level skills. The second level is the Intensive Level, which is a single semester of developmental education for students with skills below the 12th grade level. The third level is Transitional Strategies, which are strategies for students with eighth grade skills levels or below. For many of the lowest-performing students, college level courses are beyond their skill level. These developmental programs are integral in providing students the ability to gain the skills they need in order to progress towards full-credit, college-level courses. It also helps students to avoid high levels of debt, as they enroll in college and are unable to gain the credits towards the degree they are paying tuition for. It is important that Connecticut continues to invest in these programs and collect data in order to determine if these programs are successful in providing the lowest-performing students with a pathway towards full-credit, college courses.

In conclusion, this proposal undermines the jobs of our elected officials. Legislators, who are knowledgeable in the needs of their constituents and whom have become versed in the services and programs of their particular committees, would have reduced voice, as would the public. This lack of transparency circumvents public process. CAHS respectfully disagrees with this approach.